

Interview with Philip W. Ireland

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

PHILIP W. IRELAND

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This transcript was not edited by Mr. Ireland]

Q: Today is November 14, 1990. This is an interview with Philip W. Ireland on behalf of the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Mr. Ireland, I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about your background. Where did you come from. You were born when, in 1904?

IRELAND: At a period in my life I was a dishonest man. I needed two years. I said that I was born in 1904 and in fact I was in fact born in 1902. No one has ever had reason to ask me that question.

Q: Well you are caught out now.

IRELAND: I am caught out now. If this is cuttable I beg of you to cut it out because I would like to keep the 1902.

I was brought up in Tennessee.

Q: Where in Tennessee?

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IRELAND: Chattanooga. My father bought a small car, Ford, and worked with my uncle Charles Olsen who had come down from the North and later returned to Chicago and did very well. I grew up playing in the mountains and hills and pine forests on Look Out Mountain.

Q: My grandfather charged up that mountain.

IRELAND: Did he now.

Q: Yes, he was with Grant's army.

How did you become interested in the State Department and foreign affairs?

IRELAND: I went for a while to the University of Tennessee and after certain studies there I went to Beirut. I wanted to go to China but everything was filled up. I went to the American University of Beirut and stayed there three years.

Q: This was when?

IRELAND: 1925 I went out, and there I fell in love with the daughter of one of the professors, Charles Webster, who was a professor of eye, ear, nose and throat diseases, and about three nights before I left I drove my wife's little Citroen and went out to the beach and faced the moon and asked her if she would wed and the basic questions were settled. We got home 2 o'clock that morning and Dr. Webster was somewhat upset, but he gave me a great welcome. I went back to the States. At the urging of my mother I was actually thinking of going to a theological school and become a preacher. As time went on it didn't seem to be what I could best do. I did return to Beirut and there on the 11th of June, 1930 we were wed. I must say we just celebrated our 60th anniversary on the 11th of June this year. We invited a number of friends to the club for retired Foreign Service Officers—DACOR.

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Dr. Webster asked me if I would like a year at Oxford so we spent a year there. We found that I needed at least two years at school. I was admitted at Balliol and enjoyed it. My wife incidentally already had two degrees, an B.A. and a B.S. She was a scientist and later went to the pathology laboratory at Beirut when she went back. Finally, I was invited to take a doctorate, which I did, at the London School of Economics with Arnold Toynbee and Harold Laski as my directors of study. They were brilliant people. They forgot nothing, I think, they ever read or had ever given any serious thought to.

I went to Baghdad and wrote a book on how Iraq was created. The British Government really was the British India and they wanted to make Baghdad a province of Bombay. Gertrude Bell and T. Lawrence were against it as well as quite a number of others. I wrote the book almost entirely by using other books and various materials. The embassy let me have a lot of books and documents as well as I spent about 6 weeks in the library of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London. The Minister said he couldn't see how I could be so interested in such dull material. The book got a good reception except for the director of the Baghdad Times who felt I shouldn't treat such a forward looking ambition for Iraq. In any case, Singent [phonetic] didn't like it but gave it a good review. I wouldn't advise anybody to read it. It is dull. It has footnotes and is not worth, in my opinion, reading unless you are studying.

Q: I would like to move on because I know you have a very short time with me. You came into the State Department when?

IRELAND: Well, I came in when the war started. A member of the State Department said there was a lot of colonialism in the world and he brought in a lot of people to make up the pattern of the future world. On my return from England a friend of mine ask me if I would like to go to Harvard. I spent 5 years there. Then Quincy Wright asked me to come to the University of Chicago as a professor. On December 7, 1941 we were sitting in the lounge and a few months later I was asked to come to the Washington and head the Near East and African Section of that organization of the future. We had a very interesting job. We

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were not quite as successful as we had hoped. Palestine was one of the biggest issues and there was some competition for the future of that and Truman's Declaration of 1948 covered that.

Then they asked me wouldn't I like to be a member of the Foreign Service and go to Cairo? So I went to Cairo and had five years and made quite a number of friends.

Q: What was your main work in Cairo?

IRELAND: I was the head of the political section.

Q: How did we view King Farouk and his government at that time?

IRELAND: It depended on the ambassador. Farouk was a friend of Pinkney Tuck who was a young man of about the same age and didn't regard King Farouk as quite the look down their nose at him as did many of the others that came along. Jefferson Caffery came and he understood Farouk better than anyone else that I have ever seen. I felt a great deal for him. He became a friend of mine. If he had worked from 6 in the morning to 6 in the evening and put the same energy into it that he did from 6 in the evening to 6 in the morning, I think he would have made a first rate king. He had ability and had built up a great degree of loyalty by the people of Egypt.

Then I was appointed to the National War College. Came home and then became number 2 acting ambassador in Baghdad.

Q: You were in Baghdad from 1951 to 1955.

IRELAND: Yes.

Q: What was the situation when you arrived and while you were there in Baghdad.

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IRELAND: There was a certain degree of resentment of Britain, but basically the people who were ruling, those who were at the top of the political pile one might say, they did not resent the British as much as the others. There was one British officer assigned to each important section. But it was supervisory and basically advisory, etc. The British have a gift for that—bring advise without seeming to order them. The man who was king when I was there was Faisal and he was...

Q: He was a very young man wasn't he?

IRELAND: He was a young man and really not very able.

Q: How about Nuri Said?

IRELAND: Nuri Said was a friend of mine. I taught his son at Beirut. Nuri was a man who knew what things were going on and how to best follow them to help build up Iraq. I was a great admirer of Nuri. He died in an ignoble way in 1958 when killed during a coup d'etat. It was at this time that to the front came the desire to be governed only by Iraqis and as time went on this developed into being governed only by one Iraqi. And we have today a man who is [in total control] we presume. Our President has other objectives.

Q: The British were there as advisors when you went there in your official capacity and whom did you talk to? Did you talk to Iraqi officials or did you talk to...?

IRELAND: I talked to both of them. I found that Nuri was good. The Secretary for Agriculture was an extremely good one. And there was another one—a man from Said who was down from Mum Mosul. He was another one who got retribution for his closeness to the British.

Q: Well what was our feeling towards Iraq at the time? Did you all see it as a country that had considerable potential or one that probably wasn't going to...?

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IRELAND: You know I think they had in mind the maintenance of Iraq from several points of view. They were very much interested in the Kirkuk oil countries. There were several meetings of the group in Iran and we were intimate friends of the cadre for the whole of the Iraqi oil company—IPC. I do not think at that time they were upset with Iran by its claiming as much of the river as they did...

Q: We are talking about the Tigris-Euphrates...?

IRELAND: Yes, that is right. Particularly after they formed the wider river—the Shatt al Arab. I think about 8 or 10 years ago they decided to do something about it and their attempt...

Q: It has been a disaster.

IRELAND: Yes. The interest in which Saddam Hussein has attempted to use that to win the support of the Iraqi has been marvelous because they had such a difficult time with the Iranians themselves—which took place particularly through their fanaticism. The Iranians were not very practical. My father had several Iranians as students of medicine...

Q: I would like to return back, rather than today, to the 1951-55 period. How did you feel at the embassy about the future of Iraq?

IRELAND: You know I don't know if I can say. I felt it was going to make something out of itself. Students that we had at Beirut were good. It is true that it did not apply to the broad element of what other countries would call peasants. But I had a great deal of sympathy and admiration for the activity and I enjoyed my stay in Baghdad. It didn't have as much to offer as Cairo did or as Greece where I also spent some time or some of the others, but it was a—I found them to be very earnest and as students they weren't bad at all.

IRELAND: Were there any particular crisis in Iraq at the time you were there?

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IRELAND: Well, only with the Kurds. There was almost annual antagonisms to the Kurds. They had the Kurds with the Sunni-ism or whatever you want to call it of Islam.

Q: Did we have any particular policy towards the Kurds or was this purely an Iraqi problem as far as we were concerned at the embassy? Did we see the Kurds as a tool of the Soviets or something like that?

IRELAND: No, I don't think so. I think we were sympathetic with them as a group of men. The women did not have to wear the black dresses and veil. My wife went into areas in which she was the first white, or whatever word we want to use for that, woman. One time we walked up into the mountains with some Kurds who naturally all had their rifles.

Q: This is in Kurdistan?

IRELAND: This is in Kurdistan. They shot at something and then said, "Mr. Ireland, you try it." I missed it by about six feet. I was embarrassed, but they all had a wonderful time laughing like mad at my missing. I agreed with them and said if I ever got into trouble I would call for them for help. The king had sponsored that trip for me backed by the military. So everything that could be supplied was supplied to my wife and myself. She was given a mare to ride. One time it did some bucking and running and threw Mrs. Ireland on the ground—but it didn't hurt her. However, this afforded some amusement to some of the accompanying Kurds.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were?

IRELAND: I was there with both Burton Berry and Waldemar Gallman. On certain occasions the job of the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) was to run the embassy, except for political decisions. However, I could see the ambassador about a political point which was important because if anything came out and I had been the person who had done it, it would offend the ambassador. As you know the building at the Baghdad embassy was built as a front of the White House—but on the East side there were only—the kitchens

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were on one side and about two rooms on the other side. One thing that I am proud of is that I got a number of Pounds and built two more buildings for the people we needed at that time because the embassy was growing.

Q: How would you describe Ambassador Gallman's method of operation? He was there for some time. How did he work in Iraq?

IRELAND: I am unable to speak on that subject. He and I departed less than friends. I have never been able to understand it. I think Burton said that you have to watch Ireland, he has been here four years and he has a tendency to take the issue and act. I think there was some personal antagonism there and I am unable to speak. That part is not for publication. He did shift the source—we, the embassy, went back to Nuri and people like Fedi Gemali were pushed off.

Q: What was his position?

IRELAND: His position had been Minister of Foreign Affairs and then Prime Minister. He understood the country. He had an American wife who wanted to turn Moslem and did, but the Baath at that time said no because they felt there might come a time when she didn't mean it. Faisal did need it because he was opposed to groups that were pressing for a wider participation to the type of person we have now as the head of the nation.

Q: You left before the big revolution in 1958?

IRELAND: Yes, I did.

Q: But then you were consul general in Thessaloniki, is that right?

IRELAND: Yes.

Q: You were there from 1956 to '58.

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IRELAND: I went there in 1955.

Q: How did that assignment come about?

IRELAND: There was always a consul there. Also there was the group that was helping it in its economics and I had the final word on it. Altogether we had there a group of 125.

Q: We are talking about our AID program.

IRELAND: Yes, our AID program. We also were fortunate in having good USIA people there. They worked very well with the Greeks who came in to use the library.

Q: Were you still having to deal from the American side the aftermath of the civil war at that time?

IRELAND: No. We didn't. The only time of activity was the first six months that I was there, the period when they wanted to add Cyprus to Greece. I think I was surrounded by police or troops with tanks, five times in the first six months that I was there. But by enlarge we, as Americans, were well received in that period. It was Britain they had antagonism toward. They used to criticize me. Mr. Ireland why don't you work for us. I told them it really wasn't my job. But they, the British consul and his wife, had a terrible time.

Q: How did you feel at the time about the two communist countries that were very close to you— Bulgaria and Yugoslavia? How did we see them at that time?

IRELAND: The communists had come in during the end of the war but there were not many that ever came under my eye as communist Greeks. So I am not a very good person to ask this question of.

Q: I am wondering though in big terms. Was it a concern to the consul general that there might be an attack from Bulgaria or not at the time?

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IRELAND: I didn't feel it. We did not go to Bulgaria. We did go, largely by car, visit down south along the sea, which we enjoyed. My chauffeur, a Greek, found friends among communists, but I know he was not a communist. He comes to see me here every year. One of his daughters is a stewardess of the Greek airline and she provides the transportation and I do what I can for them down here.

Q: Did our consulate get involved in the Macedonian problem?

IRELAND: Not to my knowledge. No one approached me on it. One principle of any country I serve in is to get to know the parish. I went as much as we could with my own driver and our local director for economics at the consulate who had been to college in Greece and taught me a lot. He taught me among other things that the quality of your native staff is what really makes your consulate run. They get the facts and if they have worked with you enough they can add immeasurably to your own knowledge. I think I had better coverage for the economics of Greece than I had for any of the other different consulate I ever had.

Q: How did you get along with our embassy in Athens?

IRELAND: Beautifully. Our ambassador, Cavendish Cannon was good. His wife cared only for two things. For Vienna and Canada. She was extremely polite but I never got pass the tea stage.

Q: Yes, this can happen. What about James Riddleberger? He was there too when you were wasn't he?

IRELAND: Riddleberger was there and he got around a good deal. He was a good ambassador. The next one, George Allen regarded it as a vacation from Washington. That gave an entirely different scope to the U.S. Most of the people who worked in Prentfield [phonetic] , for example, he worked very hard for the operation and good relationship between Greece and the United States. I found him very good on that. That was another

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aspect I believed in—the two countries had to get along together and if you can use them for improvement of relationship you really get the essence out of a country politically. Cairo taught me that.

Q: I know, because I am concerned about your time...

IRELAND: You go along and take what you want.

Q: Then you were transferred to Aleppo. How did that transfer come along?

IRELAND: One of the CIA in Aleppo offered one of the Greeks in the military attaché's office \$10,000 for the minutes of the last meeting. The man was insulted and went in and told what the American had said and the Syrians kicked all the Americans out of Syria. Aleppo has an interesting history and a lot of Chinese. I had been in Beirut between 1925 and 1928 and used to go up to Aleppo—a very attractive city. The Italians were there. There was one family consul for 7 countries. Somebody came along at the end and said he had the press sheets bound and asked if I was interested. He couldn't afford to give them to me and asked for \$200. I gave him \$200 and eventually gave them to (inaudible) State Library. Fascinating.

Q: What were your major concerns when you were in Aleppo? What were you doing?

IRELAND: I was really trying to make friends for the United States and wipe out the fact that all of us were CIA persons. They were their only to get military information. There again, I found that visits out to areas as far over as the Kurd's country and right over to the corner towards Mosul. That was I think my main contribution because we did, after Aleppo had been open a few months, we had the embassy.

Q: We have gone through the United Arab Republic and then...

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IRELAND: Oh, yes that was the time I was there. That was an attempt to put Syria in the big nation class. I was there then, but I didn't really have much contact with it.

Q: How did you find the Syria officials. Were they avoiding you because of the CIA...?

IRELAND: No, they didn't. My wife speaks good Arabic and she took the ladies on and did a bang up job. They came voluntarily. They would call her and say they had an hour or two before picking up their husbands and was she busy? The men would invite me to their Kiwanis club. That was interesting. I was invited locally pretty well around until later. I left home and an old colleague of mine came up—two of them, one who had been in the same office in Washington and then another one. During the one from Washington they started to burn the embassy and our people had to go down the rope the back way.

Q: This was while you were there?

IRELAND: No. I was away. This man had been with me on the Syrian section of the Department of State.

Q: But while you were there relations were on relatively smooth basis.

IRELAND: Yes. We got out into the country. An Arab can be friendly and he can also be very, very smart and ask you the questions that I wanted to ask him. So he got an idea of what was going on elsewhere. Among the bedouin it was interesting because the consul general had never been able to get to them. The Department was pleased.

Q: How did we feel at that time about the Soviets and Syria? Was this a major problem yet?

IRELAND: If they did, they were very good about it. I was also close to the Syrian section of the United Nations Organization. I had the five—Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. I served a good deal in them and many of the people on the board were friends

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of mine. I got invited out not only for dinner but they took pictures of me when I turned up at one of their parties.

Q: This is the United Nations group in Syria?

IRELAND: No...

Q: You are talking now about being in Washington, right?

IRELAND: Now I have moved over to San Francisco and was a liaison officer between the various Arab delegations —the five Arab nations—and the delegation of Americans.

Q: When was this?

IRELAND: 1945.

Q: Okay. This was back in 1945 during the formation of the United Nations.

IRELAND: From April through July.

Q: When you were in Aleppo did we feel there was a Soviet problem there or not?

IRELAND: Mr. Kennedy, I can't tell you. It never turned up during the period openly.

Q: Well, then perhaps that speaks for itself. This was not something that you were particularly worried about.

IRELAND: I wasn't.

Q: You were there a little bit afterwards, but how did they view in Aleppo our landing in Lebanon—July 1958? Was there concern about the United States and it putting American forces into Lebanon?

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IRELAND: That was afterwards, I think.

Q: It was before, I think. You were in Aleppo from 1959 to '61. And we went into Lebanon right after the revolution in Iraq and all and this would have been in 1958. I remember it because I was in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia at the time. At any rate you were in Thessaloniki at the time, but I was wondering whether there was any resentment about the Americans...?

IRELAND: I was not aware of it and as I had good relations with my local staff I think I would have heard something if there was a problem.

Q: Then you came back to Washington from 1961-1964. What were you doing there before you retired?

IRELAND: I was doing routine work. I was in the Bureau of African Affairs when "Soapy" Williams was Assistant Secretary. We were building the African Bureau and I spent time traveling around the area trying to find out what was needed. After submitting my report and receiving an "excellent" from Mr. Williams, I retired.

Q: I thank you very much. This has been fascinating.

IRELAND: There were a lot of things that I wish I had done better. And I wish to say that I am not always critical of my career but by the end I was doing the ambassador's job and I think Burton Berry could not show because (inaudible) was going to take care of me and secondly he did not know nine tenths of the people that I knew and I think that was passed on to Gallman and I ran the embassy for 14 months as charg#.

In any case it was a good life. I got quite a number of things. In the end I knew more than the others because when the ambassador left about the last week of June, he gave me a reception for fourteen people.

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Q: Well, I want to cut you off because I know you...

IRELAND: Well....

Q: I really appreciate this.

IRELAND: I ask you to do two things. One is take out anything that seems like a swelled head.

Q: I will.

IRELAND: And smooth out my remarks about Berry. He was gay. He brought in a young Arab who lived upstairs in the embassy. There was also a consul who was gay. Security confronted him and he was sent back to the States. The consul had done his job well. I feel that if a man puts the United States in a dangerous position or even puts a taint the US as a nation..

Q: Well, in that period there was a very definite security threat and it was used as a blackmailing thing and we suffered from this.

IRELAND: That could be but he did his job and was liked by his staff. He had been offered \$10,000 but he turned it down four times. Then his uncle called me up in the front office, I was charg#. We just can't send—this is a type of man who if he will offer \$10,000 to a man to forget to persuade somebody in the United States to forget...send him back as a visitor. And I wouldn't give it to him. I learned a great deal of tact..... That is one of the interesting things as my bent is politics. But I never had to sign a visa. I never interfered with those doing visas.

Q: I don't want to take any more of your time now. I do hope you can come back at another time and we can talk some more about this. Could I get your signature here? This is our standard release.

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IRELAND: I am just going to ask you to do those two things. Take the ego out and..

Q: I will take the ego out and I will take out anything that seems uncomfortable, or something like that.

End of interview